



Professional Development: Making Rain by Being You

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By Craig A. Brown, J.D.

Recently, a client of mine made the following analogy about her business development efforts. “Business development can be a lot like dieting,” she said. “We know *what* to do, some of us even know *how* to do it. But for some reason we just don’t do it.”

Together we explored the reasons why she “just didn’t do it”: high billable requirements, lack of training, lack of immediate compensation or recognition and the fear of being viewed as a glad-handing self-promoter — all tempting reasons to set business development aside and go back to drafting that motion. But those reasons just skim the surface of an underlying problem. Why do people fail to do things that will benefit them? My six-year-old son recently gave me the answer. “Dad,” he declared, “I don’t brush my teeth because it’s just not fun.”

How to ‘Have Fun’

Lackluster business development efforts are seldom tied to that part of your practice you enjoy, the part that is ... well ... fun. After all, doesn’t generating new business mean you can work on matters you really enjoy? Stop dreading networking and start focusing on those parts of your practice you adore. If you picture your ideal practice five years hence and start there, business development will become less of a chore and more of an extension of your passion.

Consider the informal survey David Maister discusses in his book, *True Professionalism*. He found that on average, professionals only liked about 30% of their work; they simply tolerated the rest.

It’s easy to see why people are hesitant to go out and bring in business. They won’t like 70% of the new work they bring in! Consider, however, the lawyer who can define exactly what she enjoys and is best at. If she does that self-discovery first and focuses her business development on what gets her excited to go to work, great things can happen. Imagine being so hungry to do your work that you can’t wait to go out and ask people to bring you more. When you reach that level, business development isn’t a burden — it’s a way to focus on things you love.

For many, the answer to the question “What kind of work do I want to do?” is simple. They just know. If you’re like that, focus on that passion when conducting an otherwise-tedious business development activity. However, if you are struggling to pinpoint what really excites you, take heart. There are ways to identify the best type of practice for you.

Ask Yourself Some Basic Questions

You’d be surprised how many people haven’t reflected on fundamental questions, such as the following:

- What are my strengths?
- What gets me excited professionally?
- What kind of personality do I have?
- What kind of client do I want to work for?
- What type of person do I want to do business with?

- What kind of work will lead to relationships with people I enjoy?
- What industries excite me?
- What kind of work will allow me to do the things I do best every day?
- What activities do I enjoy? Writing? Arguing? Speaking? Drafting? Researching? Advising Others?
- Schedule some time to reflect. Find mentors and trusted peers and bounce ideas off them. You'll come up with additional questions yourself or with their help.

Formal Testing

Tests can give you great insight into your personality, aptitude, strengths, successes and interests. Some are free or available for a nominal fee. Here are a few:

- The Myers & Briggs Foundation www.myersbriggs.org;
- Johnson O'Connor Research Foundation www.jocrf.org;
- Caliper www.calipercorp.com;
- Gallup www.gallup.com;
- Marcus Buckingham www.marcusbuckingham.com;
- Clifton StrengthsFinder www.strengthsfinder.com;
- Kolbe www.kolbe.com;
- MAPP www.assessment.com; and
- CPP, Inc. www.cpp.com.

Assessment Exercises

Hundreds of exercises can help you understand your strengths and passions. My favorite, Success Patterns, is simple to do but has powerful impact. Simply make a list of every success you can remember since kindergarten. Once you start, you'll find it's not that hard to remember successes—they're tucked away inside you. When you review your list of successes, you'll see patterns that give you insight into your strengths.

Several books have excellent exercises to help you get started. I recommend three:

- Now, Discover Your Strengths, by Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton;
- What Color Is Your Parachute? by Richard Nelson Bolles; and
- I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It, by Barbara Sher.

Remember, we naturally spend time on things we enjoy. Center your client development efforts on your passions and you'll find that even spending an hour doing something as mundane as reviewing lists of prospective clients becomes bearable.

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